



**Testimony of
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Field Hearing on "The Katrina Impact on Crime and the Criminal Justice System in New Orleans"

**Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Lawless Memorial Chapel, Dillard University
April 10, 2007**

Thank you for having me here today. It's always special when Congress comes to town. It means we matter here. It means New Orleans still matters. But it also means that there are problems we haven't yet solved.

No one will dispute that we face many issues in this City. We wouldn't be here today if we didn't. But within that plethora of issues, there are some that are more important than most. Crime, and crime prevention, is that important.

Now, we've seen some disputes over the impact of crime statistics. We've heard that, modeled one way, with generous population assumptions, our crime rate is relatively stable. We've heard that, modeled other ways, assuming a smaller population, crime has risen drastically. We're tired of hearing interpretations and assumptions. Whatever crime we have is too much, and whatever solutions we're putting in place can't come fast enough. Those are indisputable facts.

It is also a fact that this government, all governments, local, state, and federal, have begun to act. At the local level, the City Council, led by Councilman James Carter, established a Crime Summit, where community activists, leaders, and national experts came together to address issues and formulate solutions to our crime problem. We've increased our police budget, raising pay for officers and used that pay increase to entice new recruits. We suspended residency requirements that, post-Katrina, would have made it impossible to expand our police force. We've raised salaries for Assistant District Attorneys, in an attempt to both recruit and retain legal talent.

For the first time in recent memory, all of our leaders are on the same page. Police Superintendent Warren Riley and District Attorney Eddie Jordan have come together on agreements to help with processing, evidence gathering, and prosecution of cases. Today, there are dedicated task forces of prosecutors charged with interfacing with police officers, to make sure that particular cases have particular contacts within both offices, to facilitate their movement through the system. Police officers are learning how to write better, more efficient reports, and ADA's are learning how to better prepare officers to testify in cases. Both departments are learning from each other, and that is a positive step. We're looking at models, based on best practices, of everything that's worked. Community policing, Broken Windows, neighborhood watch. You name it, we're looking at it.

There are partnerships at the state level, that have allowed the National Guard and State Police to augment our law enforcement capacity. We've been sharing a crime lab with Jefferson Parish, as we struggle to find the funding necessary to rebuild ours. There are partnerships with the DEA, for dedicated narcotics units, with the DOJ for extra prosecuting capacity, with the US Attorney, to move cases into Federal Court when possible. Everything is, and should, be done with both eyes toward making the systems involved work better.

That's some of what we're doing, but it's far from everything that needs to be done, and that's where we need your help. We are in desperate need of additional federal dollars to rebuild our Criminal Justice system. We need our courts back, fully operational. We need our crime lab funded, built, and running. We need to increase the number of officers on our streets, and we need to help our community help itself.

We need our parks reopened. We need better schools for our kids. We need recreational activities at night and in the summer. All of that, I hope, you can help us with. And there might be people who say, "why spend money on playgrounds when we should be building prisons?" We already have one of the highest incarceration rates in the country, particularly among African-American men. If we could arrest our way out of this problem, we would have done it a long time ago.

The simple truth is, if there is ever a simple truth to be told, that every part of our system must work better in order for our system to work. Our schools must teach our children, who'll use that knowledge to build careers and economic wealth, with which they'll invest in their children and communities, which will build stronger communities, which strengthens individual responsibility, which creates a stronger city, and a better quality of life.

But better schools without recreational activities isn't enough. Because we all have kids, or know kids or were kids, and know that if you don't give kids something to do with the time they have, they'll do things you don't want them to be doing, with the time they shouldn't have.

But schools and recreation without police and prosecutorial protection isn't enough. Because if we can't help people feel safe now, they won't wait around for their children to change the world. So this too, is indisputable fact.

Finally, everything I've mentioned here can be done, and should be done. And the fact that we're here, as I said before, means we all want it to be done. Because here matters. New Orleans matters. It's a special place with an indomitable spirit. It deserves to be saved. We can save it. And that, as well, is an indisputable fact.